

Welcome to *The Silverman Sentinel*....

Welcome to the first issue of *The Silverman Sentinel*. With email ever present and everywhere, I hope you find this periodic update of Council news and my activities useful. Please contact me with your suggestions, thoughts and comments. You can call me at 240/777-7960, send me an email at Councilmember.Silverman@MontgomeryCountyMD.gov or check out the Council's web page at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council.

While local government focuses primarily on the budget in the next two months, clearly, as Americans, our main thoughts are on the conflict in Iraq and our prayers are for the safe and quick return of our armed forces to their families and loved ones.

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Budget Overview

Batten down the hatches! With the March 17 release of the County Executive's proposed operating budget for the next year, and potential state cuts and tax increases looming on the horizon, we have the makings of our own "perfect storm." I will probably need to wear my tie decorated with "lifesavers" every day for the next two months as we grapple with the toughest budget decisions I have faced since my election to the Council in 1998.

I like to say that budgets aren't about money, but about priorities. I intend to focus on the priorities that make Montgomery County a special place to live: excellent schools, parks and recreation, support for people in need, traffic congestion relief, and good quality basic services. That will be a tall order and requires tough choices about cutting lower priorities. Tax increases will be a last choice, not a first choice. However, if I am convinced they are the only way to sustain our key priorities, I will support them.

A \$3 billion dollar budget contains thousands of budget decisions affecting our residents, but here are some of the highlights and major issues we'll face:

- Duncan proposes a 5.3% increase in funding for our public schools. However, with projected record-breaking school enrollment of over 140,000 students next fall, this funding is still \$31 million less than requested by the Board of Education. And that request is almost entirely for a standstill budget. We must continue to make sure all of our children receive a first-rate education, including

continuation of all day kindergarten and small classes in the early grades. I am committed to finding more resources for our schools if humanly possible.

- Duncan's proposed budget makes scores of cuts and eliminates 180 jobs in County government, saving \$11 million. Additional police, sheriff, and correctional jobs, in part for homeland security, result in a net job reduction of about 50 positions. We will scrub the budget to see if further cuts can be made.
- Local income tax rates go up one-quarter percent under the proposed budget. Someone with a taxable income of \$100,000 would see an increase of \$250 under that proposal.
- The Executive proposes to increase the property tax by 3 cents to help pay for a major increase in transportation funding needed to tackle the County's horrendous traffic congestion. A family in a home assessed at \$300,000 would see a \$90 increase in property taxes due to the higher rate. However, even before any talk of rate increases, soaring assessments throughout the County are adding as much as a 10% increase in property tax bills for many families. Add to that, the recent proposal from the Governor and State legislative leaders to increase the State property tax by 5 cents, and any local property tax rate increase becomes very problematic. I am committed to rolling up our sleeves to tackle traffic congestion, but we will probably need to figure out another way to pay for it.

The next several weeks will be intense with public hearings in early April, committee worksessions the remainder of April and full Council actions by mid-May. For more details on the Executive's proposed budget, and Council worksessions, check out the County's web site mentioned at the beginning of this newsletter.

A Place to Call Home

As Chairman of the Council's Planning, Housing, and Economic Development Committee, one of my top priorities for the next four years is to tackle the County's serious shortage of apartments and homes affordable to our families and workforce. Lack of affordable housing directly contributes to congestion on our roads and high mobility among poor students in our schools.

In case there is any doubt about the seriousness of the situation, take a look at some of the "reality checks" our Planning staff provided in a recent series of reports.

- A beginning firefighter in Montgomery County makes \$32,539;
- The median price of a new townhouse is \$265,135;
- The income needed to buy that townhouse is \$76,000.

So, even if two firefighters got together and got married, they still wouldn't have enough income to buy a new median priced townhouse! It should come as no surprise that 69%

of the members of the Montgomery County Career Firefighters live outside of Montgomery County. It is not right that the firefighters who protect our lives and our property can't afford to live here.

Montgomery County's Housing Policy states that we need to build about 1,000 new affordable and special needs homes each year. Clearly, we are going to have to take more aggressive action if we are going to meet that goal. And we have already begun.

- As one of the new Council's first actions, we adopted legislation I sponsored to clarify that moderately priced dwelling units (MPDUs) can be built voluntarily in smaller housing developments of fewer than 35 homes. (They are required in developments above that number.)
- Under the leadership of Planning Board Chairman Derick Berlage, County agencies have initiated a "Green Tape" fast track review and permit process for developments with at least 20 percent affordable housing.
- Based on a proposal I made last year, staff have identified a group of publicly-owned properties that may be suitable sites for affordable or special needs housing. Next step: moving from paper to projects!
- Five Councilmembers have joined me in sponsoring a Resolution to dedicate a set amount of funding each year for our Housing Initiative Fund which is used to build and rehab affordable housing. County Executive Doug Duncan has championed this approach, and this dedicated funding will help provide the housing our families and workforce so desperately need. In tight budget times, funding for affordable housing is often the first to go; we won't let that happen here.

Silver Screens in Silver Spring

Years of hard work culminate in exciting events in Silver Spring over the next month. On March 31, Discovery Communications unveils its new world headquarters in downtown Silver Spring. Be sure to check out the dinosaur in the lobby! The American Film Institute, in a magnificently restored Silver Theatre, brings film legend Clint Eastwood to receive an honorary award in early April. Public film showings begin in mid-April. Kudos to all who have labored mightily to bring beautiful buildings, but more importantly, new life to downtown Silver Spring!

Help a Child

Make a difference this summer and help give a head start on learning to some young students in some of our neediest schools. Volunteer as a tutor for the MCPS Summer

Adventures in Learning. Minimum commitment is four hours, plus training sessions.
Contact Marina McKee at MCPS at 301/279-3100 or marina_mckee@fc.mcps.k12.md.us.

Quote of the Day

“The Person Who Says It Cannot Be Done, Should Not Interrupt the Person Doing It.”